

# A MODERN JEW WRITES ABOUT JESUS

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There is now being issued a monthly magazine named "Commentary" under the sponsorship of "The American Jewish Committee," which has for its objective the presentation of "thought and opinion on Jewish affairs and contemporary issues," with its pages open to "diverse points of view and belief." The editors certainly hew to the line in the matter of "liberality." One can find among its articles almost every conceivable viewpoint, from Jewish agnosticism to the most fanatical Jewish orthodoxy.

In a comparatively recent issue I found a very remarkable article entitled "A Religious Bridge Between Jew and Christian." The writer, Hans Joachim Schoeps, is a distinguished Jewish theologian who teaches in the University of Marburg, Germany. Dr. Schoeps begins by pointing out that "It is impossible to forget that the founder of Christianity was, in flesh and blood, a Jew, that the first apostles who brought His teachings to the gentiles were Jews." Then he points out that today both "Judaism and Christianity have a common enemy, the general godlessness which denies the existence of a transcendental realm." Thus, he argues, at least *some* understanding between the two faiths would be timely.

How far can this mutual understanding extend? Here Dr. Schoeps concedes nothing as a Jew. "Every Jew today, as in the past," he declares, "must reject Jesus as Messiah of Israel." "We Jews," he writes, "can in no event accept the idea that the Messiah has already come."

## Does God "Stop Along the Way"?

If we ask why the Jew cannot accept the idea that the Messianic Redeemer has come, Dr. Schoeps replies, "A redeemed world would have to look different. We cannot admit that the prophetic promises concerning the character of the 'last days' have been fulfilled. We *profoundly feel the unredeemed condition of the world.*" And then he quotes with approval the utterance of another great Jew, Martin Buber: "A partial anticipation of world redemption, as for example a redemption of the soul, is something we cannot comprehend. . . . We know in history no middle, but only an end. The end of the path of God, who does not stop along the way."

Now if I understand Dr. Schoeps, he feels that a redemption which redeems only the soul, leaving the world unredeemed in its social and political order, is not in harmony with the great Messianic promises of the Old Testament prophets. On this point Dr. Schoeps is on solid ground. But the answer to the problem is found in what Paul wrote in Romans 9 through 11. God in Christ has redeemed the souls of all believers through Calvary, and at His second coming He will usher in a completely new social and political order. If there is such a thing as the regeneration of the soul, a very present reality, there is also coming a regeneration of the world system (see Matt. 19:28). The delay of the latter



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has been due to the unbelief of the Jewish nation, not to any partial redemption on the part of God. The very history of the chosen nation, as recorded in the Old Testament, should have taught Dr. Schoeps that the God of Israel does sometimes "stop along the way." Dr. Schoeps has been getting his ideas of Christian redemption from a theology unduly colored by the dualism of Platonic philosophy. He should have gone directly to the New Testament which, by the way, is in absolute harmony with the Old Testament prophets. God's redemption in the Messiah is complete, not partial, just as Dr. Schoeps has rightly affirmed. The time element of its various phases is another matter, something which has puzzled many thoughtful men, even the prophets themselves. It is not surprising, therefore, that Dr. Schoeps finds the problem somewhat difficult.

## An Astonishing Admission

Popularly, it is supposed that to all orthodox Jews we Christians are flagrant idolaters because we worship Jesus as the second person of the Triune God. Dr. Schoeps argues differently. He says that according to Jewish religious law, non-Jews are divided into two classes—idolaters and "Noachides." The Noachides are those gentiles who have taken upon themselves the seven injunctions already known to Noah before the birth of the nation of Israel. These injunctions forbade idolatry, blasphemy, unchastity, bloodshed, robbery, eating the flesh of living animals; and laid upon men the necessity of seeking justice. In the Talmud such were called "sons of Noah" and enjoyed equal rank with Israelites. While Dr. Schoeps thinks that the whole number of "true Christians" is very small (which is true), he concedes that from the Jewish standpoint each one of such must be recognized as a true "Noachide"; and to these is permitted "*shittuf*," which Dr. Schoeps defines as "the worship of a second divine being." Thus he argues that true Jewish tradition has always distinguished sharply between gentile idolatry and the Christian worship of Christ. "Hence it cannot be a matter of indifference to Jews," he writes, "whether a man is a Christian or a non-Christian." Dr. Schoeps is even willing to "go so far as to declare that perhaps no gentile can come to God the Father otherwise than through Jesus Christ."

But the tragic confusion in Dr. Schoeps' thinking appears when, having made the above amazing assertion concerning gentiles, he argues that the Jew is "excepted" from the necessity of coming to the Father *through Christ* because of his (the Jew's) "direct election by the Father!" And so, to Dr. Schoeps, the rule of no approach to the Father except through Christ is valid to gentiles, but not to Jews! This is the limit to which a Jew may go in seeking an understanding with Christians, according to Dr. Schoeps: "We cannot recognize Yeshuah ha-Nozri as the Christ, i. e., as the Messiah for Israel." To do so, he thinks, would be to admit that the "old covenant" of God with Israel has been annulled. Here again, I suggest, Dr. Schoeps has been reading too much exclusively in the theologians who argue that God is done with the nation of Israel

and all the divine promises have been transferred to the church. He should study more carefully the Apostle Paul's argument in Romans, chapters 9 through 11, where the immutability of God's covenants are affirmed. What this Jewish writer needs to see is that the covenants with Israel have not been "annulled" in Jesus of Nazareth; rather they have been, and will continue to be, *fulfilled* in Him. Sooner or later, the Jew must (like the gentile) deal with this same Jesus. The real difference, if there is any, between Jew and gentile, is that the gentile in coming to God through Christ must turn his back upon all his former religion, if any. But the Jew needs only to recognize in Christ the ancient God of his fathers. To borrow the words of the Book of Hebrews, the Jew needs only to "go on to perfection," i. e., full growth or maturity (6:1). To reject Jesus of Nazareth is to reject his own Covenant-God.

#### *Did Dr. Schoeps Leave the Door Open?*

While this Jewish writer seems to have shut the door absolutely to any reconciliation of Jewish and Christian viewpoints, he closes his article with the amazing concession that this irreconcilability may apply *only to the present*. Both Jews and Christians, he argues, must go

their separate ways living according to their respective covenants, one made at Sinai, the other at Golgotha; "both absolutely valid." But there will come a time "*in the future where the parallels intersect.*"

Here I can do nothing better than to let Dr. Schoeps state his wistful conclusion in his own words: "The Messianism of Israel aims at that which is to come; the eschatology of the gentile church at the return of him who has come. . . . The church of Jesus Christ has preserved no portrait of its lord and savior. If Jesus were to come tomorrow, no Christian would know his face. *But it might well be that he who is coming at the end of days, he who is awaited by the synagogue as by the church, is one, with one and the same face.*"

Surely, the days of the coming Son of Man must be very near, when, as the prophet declares, "And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and supplication; and they shall look unto me whom they have pierced; and they shall mourn for him" (Zech. 12:10).

The face of the eternal God is indeed one: "And the throne of God and the Lamb shall be therein; and his servants shall serve him; and they shall see his face" (Rev. 22:3-4).